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AUTHOR McClinton, Sandra L.; Topping, Carolyn
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ABSTRACT

Teachers' perceptions of students' adjustment to first grade were investigated in an attempt to discover whether or not the extended kindergarten day (EKD) affects such adjustment. The sample consisted of 80 children from 10 public first grade classrooms in a central Colorado school district. Eight children were randomly selected from each classroom, four from regular kindergartens, and four from extended kindergarten day classes. Males and females were equally represented in each group. The first grade teachers rated their students during the sixth week of the school year on a specially designed and validated 21 item rating scale consisting of academic ability and social adjustment subscales. Results indicate that first grade teachers judge children coming from EKD classrooms to be more capable students than those from regular kindergartens. (Author/RH)

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Extended Day Kindergartens: Are the Effects Intangible?

Sandra L. McClinton
Concordia College, Bronxville

Carolyn Topping
Early Childhood Education Specialist
Boulder Valley Public Schools

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Abstract

This study examines teachers' perception of students' adjustment to first grade. Teachers rated randomly selected groups of their students who had come from either regular or extended day kindergartens, whose primary difference was in length of class day. The results show teachers judge students from extended day kindergartens to be better adjusted to first grade than those from regular kindergartens.

Extended Day Kindergartens: Are the Effects Intangible?

The transition from kindergarten to first grade is a major one for children in many respects. Two of the most obvious changes requiring adjustment are 1) the greater emphasis on academic content in first grade and 2) the longer time spent in school daily, from under three hours in kindergarten to six hours in first grade. It seems reasonable to suspect that changes in kindergarten on either one of these two factors could affect children's adjustment to first grade. This study attempts to examine the effects of lengthening the kindergarten day on children's first grade adjustment, when the basic kindergarten curriculum remains essentially unchanged.

Virtually all the research which has been done on the relative effects of longer or extended kindergarten day (EKD) programs has compared programs which not only lengthen the time spent in kindergarten but also change the curriculum in various ways, usually toward a heavier academic emphasis. (See for example, 1, 4, and 5.) In the few cases where differences between regular and EKD programs are found, it is impossible to determine whether those differences are attributable to the longer day, the changed curriculum, or some combination of the two. For example, Cleminshaw and Guidubaldi (3) report having found that children attending an all-day, alternate day kindergarten scored significantly higher on an academic measure than those

in a half-day, every day program. However, their study examined a total of only four kindergarten classes, with each class differing from the others in length of day and amount of structure (traditional versus open). Further, there was a significant interaction between time and structure on academic performance.

In order to isolate the effects of time alone, a comparison was made in this study between groups of classes in which the primary difference was the length of the school day. Any variation in the curricula of the classes was no more than would be found among any group of teachers. That is, the variations were distributed across both experimental and control classes with no particular emphasis being attributed to either group. Programs in both EKD and regular classes were based on the district curriculum, which emphasized language arts, pre-reading and pre-math. Teachers in the EKD program used the additional time at school to extend the basic curriculum.

A preliminary investigation of the end of year academic achievement of eight EKD kindergarten classes compared to a control group of eight regular kindergarten classes showed no significant differences between groups as measured by the California Test of Basic Skills, level A. A follow-up study of the first grade achievement of these groups again showed no differences in achievement as measured by this test.

The present study is an effort to go beyond this strictly academic comparison in an attempt to discover whether or not the lengthened kindergarten program affects children's adjustment to first grade.

Method

The sample consisted of a total of 80 children from 10 public first grade classrooms in a central Colorado school district. Eight children were randomly selected from each classroom, four from regular kindergartens and four from EKD classes, with half male and half female subjects in each group. Thus, the experimental group consisted of forty first grade children who had attended an EKD classroom the year before, half of whom were males and half females. The control group was forty children in the same first grade classrooms who had previously attended a regular length kindergarten, again with half males and half females. There were a total of nine different EKD kindergartens which the experimental group members had attended, with the control group being drawn from approximately the same number of regular kindergarten classrooms.

The EKD classes were taught in the same schools as the regular kindergarten classes, with different teachers for each class. The regular classes met for a total of two hours and forty minutes, while the extended day lasted for four hours and fifteen minutes. Both types of classes met five days per week.

The first grade teachers were unaware of the purpose of the study, and the children they were asked to evaluate were never identified to them as having come from EKD or regular kindergartens. The teachers rated their students during the sixth week of the school year.

Instrument

A rating scale was constructed for the purpose of determining whether the first grade teachers could detect any differences among these students. The scale was designed to take a minimum of the teachers' time (from approximately one to three minutes per child) and consisted of a total of 21 items scored on a five-point rating scale. A factor analysis of the scale revealed the items fell into two subscales: one addressing academic ability, and the other social adjustment.

An example of an item in the social subscale is: In a stressful situation, this child will begin to cry: always, often, sometimes, seldom, never. An example from the academic subscale is: In relation to the other class members, how would you rate this child's ability in reading (also arithmetic, speaking, listening, handwriting): unusually high, above average, average for a beginning first grader, below average, unusually poor.

The instrument was piloted by four teachers not participating in this study, who each rated four students. They found the scale to have high face validity. An item analysis revealed the Hoyt estimate of reliability for the social subscale to be .89, for the academic subscale .92, and for the total scale .93, indicating a high level of internal consistency in each. As a further reliability check, approximately one month following their original rating, the first grade teachers were asked to reevaluate a randomly selected half of their subjects. The correlation between their first and second ratings was .74.

Results

A 10 x 2 x 2 analysis of variance was used in which the factors were teacher, method (EKD or regular kindergarten) and sex. The dependent variable was score on the rating scale. The data were analyzed for the total score on the rating scale, and also for each subscale (social and academic) separately. For the total score, there was a main effect of method, $F(1,9) = 6.54$, $p < .05$. There was also a main effect of method for the academic subscale, $F(1,9) = 5.15$, $p < .05$. None of the effects was significant for the social subscale, although method approached significance, $F(1,9) = 4.97$, $p < .10$. All other effects in these analyses were nonsignificant, $p > .05$.

Discussion and Interpretation

These results indicate that first grade teachers judge children coming from EKD classrooms to be more capable students than those from regular kindergartens. Whether or not these judgements are accurate is a separate issue not addressed here. However, research on the effects of teachers' expectancy (e.g., 2) would indicate the importance of these judgements regardless of their accuracy.

Advocates of lengthening the kindergarten day have thought benefits of this program exist which are more intangible than those which can be detected by measures of academic achievement. This study is an effort to detect an effect which is difficult to quantify. While very preliminary

in nature, these results point to the possibility that simply lengthening the amount of time children spend in kindergarten can give them a head start, at least in the eyes of their teacher, in their adjustment to first grade.

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